

Cozy Apologia by Rita Dove

The one with the hurricane

Waiting for a storm to hit, the speaker hunkers down, snug and safe in her study. Though Hurricane Floyd disrupts the business of daily life, it also allows time for daydreams. So, with time on her hands, the speaker finds herself daydreaming about her partner. Everything the speaker sees, from the rain outside to the ink on the page, reminds her of her partner. She pictures him as a knight in shining armour, protecting her. He's a vivid contrast, she thinks, to the 'worthless' boys she used to date. She's embarrassed by how content their cosy, ordinary lives have made them. Yet she draws comfort from filling the 'stolen time' resulting from the hurricane's approach with thoughts of Fred.

The word 'apologia' means 'a defence'. A paraphrase of the poem's title might be, 'A Defence of Cosiness'.

Key Quotes:

- The poem is in first person and could be autobiographical - "I could pick anything and think of you".
- Uses a cliché ironically - "the chain mail glinting" and has a dreamy tone but is affectionate and humorous.
- It is a love poem filled with day to day details such as "compact disks" and "faxes" which shows it is about the realities of relationships, not "the divine".
- The hurricane "Big Bad Floyd" has allowed her to daydream about the "worthless" boys of her past.
- Final words - "I fill this stolen time with you" suggests their relationship is happy and appreciated and the tone is reflective and thoughtful. Being content is better than great romance - it is consistent.

Context:

- It is set against the arrival of Hurricane Floyd, a powerful storm which hit the east coast of the USA in 1999.
- Rita Dove is American and married to the writer Fred Viebahn (probably the "Fred" in the poem)

Structure:

- In the first stanza, Dove uses the clichéd image of a knight in shining armour.
- In the second stanza, Dove reminisces on her childhood 'crushes'.
- In the last stanza, Dove ends with how happy she is with her everyday 'ordinary; life/relationship.

Possible themes and links:

- Relationships and love - Sonnet 43, She Walks in Beauty and Valentine

Dove has probably used the title 'Cozy Apologia' to defend her relationship because other people might view their relationship as 'boring' and 'uneventful' but to her their relationship is special and is worth protecting. Fred is Dove's husband.

Cozy Apologia - for Fred

Dove is using a first person viewpoint. This suggests that this is autobiographical. The word 'anything' suggests everything in her life has memories of being with her husband.

Dove lists everyday things to emphasise her love for her partner. 'The lamp' could suggest he is the hope and happiness in her life. The 'glossy blue' ink could symbolise the inspiration he gives her on a daily basis.

I could pick anything and think of you—
This lamp, the wind-still rain, the glossy blue
My pen exudes, drying matte, upon the page.
I could choose any hero, any cause or age
And, sure as shooting arrows to the heart,
Astride a dappled mare, legs braced as far apart
As standing in silver stirrups will allow—
There you'll be, with furrowed brow
And chain mail glinting, to set me free:
One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.

Dove uses a clichéd image of a knight in shining armour. This has a dreamy tone but is quite humorous. 'Set me free' could imply that Dove feels that her husband rescued her.

This could symbolise that life gets too busy to stop and think about the love for your partner so Dove is appreciating this 'stolen time'.

This is 'oddly male' as hurricanes usually have female names. This reinforces her memories of the failed past relationships she has had.

This post-postmodern age is all business: compact disks
And faxes, a do-it-now-and-take-no-risks
Event. Today a hurricane is nudging up the coast,
Oddly male: Big Bad Floyd, who brings a host
Of daydreams: awkward reminiscences
Of teenage crushes on worthless boys
Whose only talent was to kiss you senseless.
They all had sissy names—Marcel, Percy, Dewey:
Were thin as licorice and as chewy,
Sweet with a dark and hollow center. Floyd's

This represents their busy and maybe separate lives together.

Dove has time to think about the 'worthless boys' she used to be interested in. The simile 'were as thin as licorice' suggests that she wasted her time with them and that they had no substance to them because they are 'hollow' and empty.

Dove feels embarrassed by how happy she is because nothing exciting or eventful is happening in their life/relationship. Their love/relationship is simple.

Cussing up a storm. You're bunkered in your
Aerie, I'm perched in mine
(Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):
We're content, but fall short of the Divine.
Still, it's embarrassing, this happiness—
Who's satisfied simply with what's good for us,
When has the ordinary ever been news?
And yet, because nothing else will do
To keep me from melancholy (call it blues),
I fill this stolen time with you.

The word 'Divine' emphasises that their relationship might not be viewed as heavenly and unique but Dove is happy with their everyday love.

Fred is the person who keeps Dove from 'melancholy'. This suggests he is the only person who makes her happy.

Rita Dove

The poem ends with Dove having an appreciation of this 'stolen time'. It implies she is grateful to have time to sit and think about her relationship and how content she is with her life.